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**Submission for *Architecture and Culture*, Vol. 4, Issue no. 2.**

Title: **An Open Issue**

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Editors' introductory essay – no abstract

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**Main Text:**

**An Open Issue**

This tenth issue of *Architecture & Culture* is its first 'open' issue, its first without an explicit theme. As a relatively young journal which aims "to promote a conversation between all those who are curious about what architecture might be and what it can do,"<sup>i</sup> we are conscious ourselves of being in Umberto Eco's "'open' situation, *in movement*. A work in progress."<sup>ii</sup> Eco, talking about works of art – whether music, painting or architectural compositions – argued that they should be understood as specific 'closed' forms which simultaneously offer open and multiple interpretations and performances, constructed by the different perspectives of each listener, viewer or inhabitant. In a similar vein, we consider the work published in *Architecture & Culture* to be open to construction by its readers as well as its authors and editors. As editors, we set out to allow for interplay between articles, between image, text and sometimes sound, between modes of writing, and between different viewpoints, in an openness that we hope makes possible disciplinary and interdisciplinary insights, deepened understanding, new knowing.

Because our intention for the journal as a whole is that it should be 'open', both within and beyond itself, we have found ourselves, inevitably,

considering this particular issue not as un-themed, but as one that has openness itself as a theme, albeit implicit. It is not a theme we asked authors to respond to, as if to a call for papers, but one we realise has inflected our selection. This means, of course, that we are not entirely open-minded in our judgements. We explore here our prejudices, our criteria, for what we believe openness to be.

One of the papers we chose, Mark Dorrian's "What's Interesting: On the Ascendancy of an Evaluative Term", has proved remarkably helpful in this process of self-interrogation. Dorrian proposes that architectural projects tend now to be judged not so much in terms of what is 'good', which implies pre-existing, fixed standards to be met, as in terms of the 'interesting': "now it is good to be interesting, better than to be only good."<sup>iii</sup> He suggests, like Eco, that this means the critic no longer stands outside a work, "pronouncing with finality," but becomes instead a co-producer. He speculates that this emphasis has come about because we are no longer entirely sure what an architectural project should be, where its boundaries lie. Instead of focusing on built or buildable form, we give value to projects that "dramatise" the conditions in which architecture takes place, making them visible, "putting pressure on them."<sup>iv</sup> We realised that our evaluation of the articles we received implied similar predilections.

The "Geopoetry" of Geraldine Dening and Simon Elmer published here conforms instantly to these requirements. The script for and record of a performance which was itself preparation for a walk around London's Greenwich Peninsula involving actors, audience and other hangers-on, the text and images here are "only the score ..., the performance the precipitate of the event, and the event a collective realisation specific to the time, place and making of its happening." The geopoetry walker performs the poem with footsteps that "articulat[e] – like the click of the tongue in the mouth of the speaker – the space of the city they cover."<sup>v</sup> It is performed to loosen "the grip of corporate speech," to "dramatis[e] the limits of speech and freedom"<sup>vi</sup> – to prise open our complacency and give traction to our concerns about so-called urban development.<sup>vii</sup> In Robert Mugerauer's "Anthropotechnology: Sloterdijk

on Environmental Design and the Foam Worlds of Co-Isolation”, which follows Denning and Elmer’s score, it is the conditions in which contemporary housing projects take place – the assumptions about what housing should do – that are dramatised, brought into the open, using Sloterdijk’s methods of ‘explication.’ Unflinchingly open to the pitfalls as well as the promises of such housing projects, Mugerauer discusses what they shelter or separate us from, as well as what they leave us open to.

Dorrian suggests that ‘interesting’ architectural projects look into the “complex ecologies, human and non-human, in which architecture takes place.”<sup>viii</sup> So, too, do the papers, visual, verbal and aural, that we judged ‘open.’ Torres-Campos’ project, which provides the frontmatter for this issue, is a representational device that opens up the layers of Manhattan’s past, both engineered and geological, both instrumental and poetic. Opening downwards through built structures, rocks and time, it becomes a kind of archaeology of representational knowledge that belies our sense of anthropomorphic scale.<sup>ix</sup> In “The Ecological Being: Anandgram and the Expanded Leprous Body”, Rachel Armstrong shows how, in a village built by and for those who have contracted leprosy, it becomes almost impossible, and certainly irrelevant, to identify where a person becomes prosthesis, where prosthesis becomes building, or where building becomes community. All contribute together to an ‘ecological being’ – not the classical delineated body, or a body understood mechanically, but a body thought in terms of “ever-shifting relationships between the animate, the inanimate and the environment.”<sup>x</sup> The people of Anandgram show how our structures and our selves are subject to continuous mutual redefinition.

The openness that Dorrian’s ‘interesting’ discussion helps us to clarify acknowledges the provisionality of architecture and all that surrounds it. “I have always been in disagreement with people who were certain what architecture was,” declares Bernard Tschumi in an interview with Gordana Fontana-Giusti, published here. “For me, architecture is in a constant state of definition, hence it is necessary to establish a dialogue with other areas of knowledge.”<sup>xi</sup> But it is not only interdisciplinary relationships that Tschumi

focuses on, as he sets out in simple terms his familiar emphasis on the conjunction between ‘event’ and ‘space’ – the conjunction which is the moment when something happens, the undisciplined, unprogrammed moment when architecture takes place.

To experience an event – to experience architecture – we must be open to it. The papers in this issue have taught us to be open to sound (Michael Fowler’s “Sounding City”, a short story about the way we can all ‘play’ the city), open to pleasure (Renée Tobe’s “Pleasure in Understanding, Pleasure in Not Understanding”, on the particular *jouissance* that watching certain carefully structured films can bring), open to the uncanny (Christopher Smith and Benjamin Jay Shand’s “Architectural Wounds”, photographs of Berlin’s Teufelsberg that open up its uncomfortable, unresolvable history), open to silence (Christos Kakalis’ “Silence, Music and Architectural Design”, in which, with Arvo Pärt, he shows us that silence, understood as stillness, can be an openness to existential experience itself).

The open issue closes with Kerry Sizheng Fan’s “Shanzhai”, a fanfare to the flattery that is imitation, as Chinese manufacturers and builders find models to copy from all over the world. Plagiarism, certainly, even theft. But Fan’s succinct account of the copying business portrays it ultimately as openness to the ideas and practices of others, a recognition of their value that invests them with new meaning. If this is borrowing, not yet sharing, it is perhaps because it is not fully reciprocated.

What this issue has helped us to clarify is that openness, if it is to be more than merely general receptivity – receptivity to anything – requires engagement. It must go further than “the notion of collaboration as good in itself,” or than “inventing a new kind of formalism whereby discursivity, sociability and co-creativity are pursued for their own sake,” pitfalls Renata Tyszczyk warns us of in her 2011 essay “Open Field”.<sup>xii</sup> As editors, we must aim for more than the desire for cross-fertilization of media and content, to be construed in different ways by different readers, however well-meaning these intentions may be. Engagement implies participation in something shared –

here, the engagement of architecture with the broader culture that shapes and is shaped by it. We believe that architecture matters to culture as a whole, and that culture – its context, the situation within which it operates – matters to architecture.

The openness we hope to pursue is not one that dissipates architecture, expanding it to become “almost infinitely malleable” as a category.<sup>xiii</sup> Instead, it is one that asks for architecture’s deeper self-understanding, so that it can be fully pro-active with all that contributes to it. If some of our processes as a journal appear somewhat ‘closed’ (the now conventional double, ‘blind’, peer review system, inflected to respond to interdisciplinary research and practices; editorial direction, sometimes very detailed, from guest and regular editors) it is in order better to pursue this version of openness (we hope that both reviewers and editors help to situate the discourse, and, again, to engage). The openness of self-aware engagement involves – as our authors repeatedly show us – tact, wit, occasional outrage, and care. We are still learning. We welcome contributions to future ‘open’ issues that continue to engage with *Architecture & Culture* as an open, and opening, work.

(total no. of words in main body of text: 1448)

(total no. of words in endnotes: 251)

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- <sup>i</sup> *Architecture and Culture*, Aims and Scope, <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=rfac20#.VzI6G2Nsaf5>
- <sup>ii</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 22-23.
- <sup>iii</sup> Mark Dorrian, "What's Interesting: On the Ascendancy of an Evaluative Term", this issue.
- <sup>iv</sup> Ibid., xx
- <sup>v</sup> Dening and Elmer, "Geopoetry: Greenwich Peninsular", this issue
- <sup>vi</sup> Ibid., xx
- <sup>vii</sup> The Greenwich Peninsular development includes the privately-owned Peninsular Square and university buildings funded by private corporations; access is hardly open.
- <sup>viii</sup> Dorrian, op. cit., xx
- <sup>ix</sup> While Torres-Campos does not explicitly mention Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault's arguments have been a reference for a number of our contributors. Mugerauer, for instance, writes that "in Foucault's terms we have discourses (the law; insurance policies) and non-discursive practices, especially anthropotechnologies," that together "are intended to function by immunizing us from life's dangers" (this issue, xx). Anthropotechnologies are based on systems rather than discourse, but what they may do is allow for open discourse to take place (with Sloterdijk, Mugerauer focuses on our world wide webs of possible interconnection). In Torres-Campos' work, the systems pursued are representational, and therefore simultaneously factual/instrumental and poetic/discursive.
- <sup>x</sup> Rachel Armstrong, "The Ecological Being: Anandgram and the Expanded Leprous Body", xx.
- <sup>xi</sup> Bernard Tschumi, in Gordana Fontana-Giusti, "The Landscape of the Mind: an Interview with Bernard Tschumi", xx.
- <sup>xii</sup> Renata Tyszczyk, "Open Field: Documentary Game" in Suzanne Ewing et al., eds., *Architecture and Field/Work* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 99.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1986), 277.